

Bringing Coaching to the Church

By Tony Stoltzfus

Coaching has enough of a buzz surrounding it that it seems to be cropping up all over the place in today's church. While that's exciting news, it also means that people are being called "coaches" when they aren't even sure what coaching really is. How exactly do you define "coaching", how do you distinguish it from mentoring or discipling, and how do you get those differences across to people in your church?

First, it helps to have a good working definition of coaching. One line I often use is, "Coaching is the discipline of helping people grow without telling them what to do." I use that definition to distinguish it from the "telling" mode most of us minister in. Another way to define coaching is to reference the image of a personal trainer. "Pro athletes have a personal trainer to help them maximize their athletic performance. Having a coach is like having a personal trainer for every area of your life." This is a good image to use to help people see the benefits of coaching.



It also helps to contrast coaching with other disciplines. For instance, "Mentoring is imparting to *you* what God has given *me*. Coaching is drawing out of *you* what God has given *you*." This contrasts the impartation from mentor to mentoree that characterizes mentoring with coaching's thrust of encouraging a person to make their own choices and solve their own problems.

A useful image to help people connect coaching with things that are already familiar is to compare it to parenting. With infants, we take responsibility for their lives and do things for them – feed them, clothe them, change their diapers. As they move toward school age, we shift to more of a discipling mode, where we tell them what to do ("Time to go to bed, Johnnie!") and expect them to do it. As children grow toward their teenage years, we shift again toward a mentoring posture, where we impart overarching principles to them and expect them to use that knowledge to guide their choices about money, friends, their time, etc.

Finally, in their later teen and early adult years, we move into a coaching mode. At this point, we want our children to function like adults and be fully responsible for their own lives. If we are wise, we stop telling them what to do (since they don't want to hear our advice any way!), and start helping them find their own answers. If we keep telling too long, our children rebel against being controlled and set out to form their individual identities on their own, without us. Most parents with teenage or adult children can immediately grasp the rationale for taking a coaching approach. Treating others like adults by encouraging them to take responsibility for their own lives is one of the things that makes coaching a great method for working with leaders.

Here's a final tip: I never try to describe coaching without demonstrating it. You have to remember that most people have never seen coaching before, so they have no accurate images to associate with your words. You are talking coaching; they are thinking of mentoring, discipling, counseling or even their Junior High football coach. So you need to give people an experience of what coaching is in order for what you say about it to make any sense. When people see coaching in action, they are much more likely to 'get' what it is. So don't just tell – show!

For top-rated resources for bringing coaching to your church, visit:
www.Coach22.com/aboutcoaching.html